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ABSTRACT

A qualitative study was undertaken to examine the perceptions of beginning teachers who were evaluated through an innovative teacher evaluation process. The evaluation was the Collaborative Assessment Procedure (CAP) implemented in a large midwestern urban school district. Beginning teachers were assigned a teacher consultant who observed the teacher and shared the observations in conferences. The research attempted to determine if a link existed between the new teacher performance evaluation process and the beginning teachers' sense of efficacy with respect to students and other teachers. Twenty-one teachers who had participated in this process were interviewed. Thirteen experienced affirmation in the process and thought that the CAP process nurtured their professional development. Other participants experienced the CAP process as surveillance, and were much less positive about its effects. Twenty of these teachers were convinced that they could affect the lives of their students significantly. Fifteen spoke of a strong link between their CAP experiences and their growing sense of personal efficacy. Two gave CAP only slight credit for their increased sense of efficacy, and only one did not report an enhanced sense of efficacy at the end of the CAP year. The process was acknowledged to recognize the varying levels of professional development of these beginning teachers. While the construct of teachers' sense of efficacy remains difficult to assess, the CAP approach appears to enhance it for beginning teachers. (Contains 14 references.) (SLD)

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Reinventing Teacher Evaluation:

A Study of the Impact on Beginning Teachers

Problem

The importance of evaluating competence in any profession is undisputed. Yet, until recently, decades of poor teacher evaluation practice went virtually unchallenged. Although many reform proposals assume that teacher evaluation practices can fairly and consistently differentiate among teachers, Wise and Darling-Hammond's (1985) extensive study indicated that neither assumption is necessarily valid. As a result of the widespread dissatisfaction with existing teacher appraisal processes, new evaluation approaches are being developed in tandem with other school improvements efforts. Because evaluation systems are embedded in the school bureaucracy, significant organizational change relative to the format and structure of teacher evaluation is needed. With the call for school reform, the purposes of teacher evaluation are changing, along with resultant changes in the processes of evaluation.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of beginning teachers who were evaluated through an innovative teacher evaluation process. The innovative teacher performance evaluation examined in this study was the Collaborative Assessment Procedure (CAP)* implemented in the Jones City Schools, a large midwestern urban school district. Beginning teachers (first year teachers and those newly hired by the district are technically called interns) were assigned a teacher consultant who spent numerous hours in direct classroom observations and conferences with the beginning teacher throughout their initial year in the Jones City Schools. The frequency and duration of these classroom

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*The school district, its teacher evaluation program, and all participants are pseudonyms.

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observations varied depending on the CAP consultant's caseload and how the CAP consultant perceived the needs of the beginning teacher. Most beginning teachers were observed 15-20 times over the course of the academic year. Each observation included suggestions to the beginning teacher documented through the consultant's written notes. Additionally, the consultant prepared a minimum of one interim report and a culminating final report on the performance of the beginning teacher. This "reinvented" beginning teacher performance evaluation process attempted to integrate evaluation procedures with on-going professional staff development through concurrent graduate classes developed specifically for those involved in the CAP process.

This research attempted to determine if a link existed between the new teacher performance evaluation process and the beginning teachers' sense of efficacy with respect to students and other teachers. The following research questions began the process of framing this study - a study of beginning teachers' perceptions of their performance evaluations amidst complex sociocultural contexts:

1. What were the evaluation experiences of beginning teachers in this midwestern urban school district?
2. During the CAP experience, what immediate impact did the evaluation process have on their professional lives as perceived by these teachers?
3. After the CAP experience, what residual impact did the evaluation process have on their professional lives as perceived by these teachers?
4. What evidence, if any, exists that the innovative teacher performance evaluation process (CAP) has assisted teachers in developing a sense of efficacy with respect to students and other teachers?

Design

To gain an insider's perspective of CAP, qualitative research techniques were employed. Case study analysis was selected as the appropriate method to explore the impact of teacher evaluation processes on beginning teachers. Underlying the research was the guiding assumption that although reinvention of the processes used to evaluate teachers can trigger change, the impact of that change is best studied through the teachers who experienced the process first-hand. The purpose of this study was consistent with other qualitative inquires where, "The intent was to engage the informants in the inquiry as collaborators in such a way as to surface themes and meanings that were important to them, to get a glimpse of their worlds, and to hear their voices" (Canning, 1992, p. 64).

The research questions demanded an approach that was particularistic (i.e., focused on a bounded unit of study, the reinvention of beginning teacher evaluation processes in one urban school district), descriptive (i.e., designed to recount the literal experiences of these beginning teachers, as well as, their interpreted meanings), heuristic (i.e., intended to illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study), and inductive (i.e., based on inductive reasoning to form generalizations, concepts, and hypotheses emerging from data grounded in the context itself).

Methodology

The methodology of this study included a compilation of field notes, an examination of artifacts associated with the teachers' CAP experience, and interviews with teachers who had experienced this innovative teacher evaluation process either one, two, or three years prior to the study. There were 21 key informants who ranged in age from the mid-twenties to the mid-forties. All but two key informants continue to teach in this school district of over 60,000

students. At the time of their CAP experiences, 13 were elementary teachers and eight were either middle or secondary teachers. Fifty-seven percent of the key informants were female. Slightly more than twice the number of European Americans were interviewed as compared to African Americans who participated in the study. The manner in which the key informants had secured teaching positions in the school district was varied, as were their educational and occupational histories.

All interviews with key informants were audio-taped and interview logs were created for each interview, according to the process described by Merriam (1988). Descriptive themes or codes for the CAP experiences, as depicted by the key informants, were developed and then confirmed by an outside ethnographer. Triangulation was established through the use of different data sources and a multi-layered data base (audiotapes of interviews, examination of artifacts, two elite interviews, and interview logs). Drafts of individual informant profiles were sent to the teacher informants to afford them the opportunity to check the accuracy of quotations and interpretations of their interviews. Editing of the profiles occurred as a result of additional input through this member checking strategy.

Themes were developed by constantly comparing one incident or unit of information shared by the informants with another. Both convergent and divergent strategies were used to construct themes that were internally homogeneous (all items in a single category were similar) and yet heterogeneous (differences among themes were bold and distinct). In successive rounds of data analysis, this procedure was repeated until the data were fully analyzed with respect to teachers' sense of efficacy. Reviewing the data to support distinct themes made it difficult to draw the line between description and interpretation. Eisner (1991) discussed this process of determining themes to convey meaning:

> ...features that count in a setting do not wear labels on their sleeves: they do not announce themselves. Researchers must see what is to be seen, given some frame of reference and some set of intentions. The self is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it....it is not a matter of checking behaviors, but rather of perceiving their presence and interpreting their significance. (p. 33)

The challenge in coding the data was to recognize patterns from conversations that described the teachers' perceptions of their sense of teaching efficacy.

The evaluation experiences were first described and documented within the context of interviews with the beginning teachers. The experiences described were then used to analyze the teachers' perceptions of the immediate and residual impact of their performance evaluation experiences. Finally, these experiences were examined through an additional lens, that of their perceived impact on the beginning teachers' sense of efficacy with respect to students and other teachers.

Findings

Explicit and Implicit Knowledge of CAP

Explicit knowledge of the CAP process was garnered from artifacts associated with the process (e.g., the negotiated agreement, internal written communication to beginning teachers, key informants' CAP observation and evaluation documents) associated with the process, as well as elite interviews with the teachers' union president and a university consultant. These two champions conceptualized the CAP process and, together with the school superintendent, engineered its development and implementation through the district's bureaucratic, political, and legal hurdles.

Implicit knowledge of the features of the CAP process resulted from an emic perspective of the process. The insider's perception was gathered from interviews with 21 teachers who experienced the CAP process as beginning teachers.

Perceptions of CAP: Affirmation or Surveillance

Little neutrality surfaced in the summaries of the beginning teachers' year-long evaluation experiences. A polarity of experiences emerged as either *affirmation* or *surveillance*. For those 13 informants who experienced *affirmation*, the CAP process nurtured their professional development through a mixture of credible feedback and viable instructional and management suggestions, delivered by sensitive, communicative CAP consultants. In contrast, *surveillance* was the descriptive label for the experiences reported as negative. These experiences produced feelings of isolation, anxiety, and self-doubt. The performance evaluations of these beginning teachers resulted in the perception of constant, intensely critical, or non-productive surveillance. Three additional key informants reported vastly different relationships with two CAP consultants, resulting in experiences of both *affirmation* and *surveillance*.

The Implicit Features of CAP

Another layer of data analysis revealed multiple implicit features of the CAP process, distinct features not identified formally to those outside the school culture, but known to the "insiders." These implicit features were labeled as *Luck of the Draw, High Stakes: My Job's on the Line, Cooperate and Graduate, and When It's over, It's Over.*

The Immediate and Residual Impact of CAP on the Professional Lives of Beginning Teachers

The experiences described were then used to analyze the teachers' perceptions of the immediate (during the CAP experience) and residual (post-CAP) impact of their performance evaluation experiences. Four discreet, yet interrelated, themes captured the immediate impact of the CAP experience. During their first year of teaching in Jones City Schools, the CAP experience impacted beginning teachers by causing them to *network*, *enculturate*, *comply*, and *feel a strong sense of accountability* for their teaching.

The researcher asked key informants a variety of questions to gain insight into the perceived residual impact of the CAP experience. Questions included inquiries such as: What continued relationship existed with the CAP consultant? What about the key informant's current teaching was attributable to skills learned from CAP feedback? What advice would they offer beginning teachers embarking on their first year? What "haunted" them from the CAP experience? The scope of these questions revealed only one consistently discernible, post-CAP impact: beginning teachers felt validated by completing the CAP process successfully. They had documentation they met the standard set for beginning teachers in the Jones City Schools.

The completion of the final CAP evaluation document marked a shift from dependence on the CAP consultant to dependence on newly formed peer networks and/or mentors established from previous experiences. ***"When it's over, it's over"*** was implicitly known, just as graduates know the structured public graduation ceremony marks a milestone. These beginning teachers had been officially validated by their school system.

Impact of CAP on the Beginning Teachers' Sense of Efficacy

The final layer of data analysis addressed the research question: What evidence, if any, exists that the innovative teacher performance evaluation process has assisted teachers in developing a sense of efficacy with respect to students and other teachers?

Ashton and Webb's (1986) definition of teachers' sense of efficacy served as a guide for this study. A review of their conceptual construct is critical to understanding the findings relative to the assistance of the CAP process on developing these beginning teachers' sense of efficacy. They defined teachers' efficacy as:

> ...an expectancy construct....teachers' situation-specific expectations that they can help students learn. That expectation rests on assumptions of how much students are capable of learning what schools have to teach. Teachers' efficacy expectations influence their thoughts and feelings, their choice of activities, the amount of effort they expend, and the extent of their persistence in the face of obstacles. (p. 3)

Ashton and Webb outlined two discreet dimensions of efficacy: (a) sense of teaching efficacy, and (b) sense of personal teaching efficacy. A sense of teaching efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs that they can have "an effect on student performance, despite external obstacles such as family background and student ability" (1986, p. 4). A sense of personal teaching efficacy refers to a practitioner's individual assessment of personal teaching competence and personal teaching skills. A teacher with a high sense of efficacy attributes student success to factors within the classroom rather than to factors outside it. Rather than become discouraged with students' inevitably uneven learning, teachers with a high degree of efficacy regard student difficulties as challenges. They expect to be able to plan creatively to help students overcome hurdles in acquiring new skills. On the other hand, teachers with a low

sense of efficacy doubt their ability to influence student learning. Teachers with little sense of efficacy tend to attribute lack of student progress to factors such as the students' families, the school administration, the low value placed on academics in students' environments. These teachers tend to reduce their effort or give up entirely with difficult students; they become preoccupied with their own limitations as teachers.

The distinction between the two dimensions is important because appropriate professional development depends upon which dimension of efficacy is low. If teachers' sense of efficacy is low because they doubt the ability of students to learn, changing those expectations requires evidence demonstrating that students, even low-ability students, profit from instruction. In contrast, if teachers' low sense of efficacy is grounded by the belief that they lack the repertoire of skills needed to teach students, the sense of efficacy will be enhanced only if teachers acquire instructional skills that result in the opportunity to recognize increased student learning. Teachers' senses of efficacy are "subjectively reasonable beliefs" that are maintained unless evidence is presented that challenges those beliefs (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Understanding teachers' sense of both teaching and personal teaching efficacy is basic to understanding their behaviors in the classroom.

Teaching efficacy and CAP: Do I make a difference?

The belief held by these beginning teachers that teaching is a worthy profession was supported by an equally strong belief in the efficacy of their own teaching. Key informants were asked to talk about the perceived difference they made in the lives of their students. Twenty of the 21 beginning teachers who participated in this study were convinced that they could significantly affect the lives of their students and they were personally committed to doing so. Despite the strength of the responses regarding their perceived impact on students'

lives, only five of the key informants voiced a connection between their sense of teaching efficacy and their CAP experiences.

One theme, "*I Knew I was Affecting Lives,*" emerged from the informants' adamant belief their teaching affected the lives of their students, a conviction not dependent upon or a result of the CAP process. The theme, "*CAP Helped Me See I Make a Difference,*" recounts the conversations of the five informants who verbalized a link between their CAP experiences and their sense of teaching efficacy. The third theme, "*Disillusioned,*" conveys the frustration and weakened sense of efficacy one informant, Max, described as a result of his first and only year of teaching in the Jones City Schools. The final theme was titled "*The Resolve to Survive.*" This theme was voiced so strongly it could not be ignored in the discussion of teaching efficacy. However, the key informants did not directly link this "*resolve to survive*" to their CAP experiences.

Personal teaching efficacy and CAP: Am I a better teacher?

The results of this study also addressed the second dimension of Ashton and Webb's (1986) construct of personal teaching efficacy. To ascertain the perceptions of the key informants, questions such as: "Did the CAP process assist you in becoming a better teacher?" and "How did your teaching change during your first year? Did it improve? How did you know?" were posed. Fifteen of these beginning teachers spoke of a strong link between their CAP experiences and their growing sense of personal teaching efficacy. Two key informants reported a more developed sense of personal teaching efficacy at the end of their first year, but only slightly credited the CAP experience with affecting it. While not associated with their CAP experiences, three other informants also believed they had developed a stronger sense of

personal teaching efficacy during their first year in Jones City Schools. Again Max was the single informant who did not report an improved sense of personal teaching efficacy at the end of his year as a CAP participant.

Interpretations

Teachers' sense of efficacy is a crucial aspect of the ethos of schools and should be taken into account in the assessment of school reforms such as the CAP process. Results obtained through this qualitative case study extend theory relative to Ashton and Webb's (1986) two dimensions of teachers' sense of efficacy. Five theoretical links between beginning teachers' sense of efficacy and the CAP process emerged from the results of this study:

(1)The CAP process demonstrated the ability of performance evaluation to affect beginning teachers' sense of personal teaching efficacy. Informants reported a consistent link between the CAP process and their sense of personal teaching efficacy. Many of the discussions between these beginning teachers and their CAP consultants answered the teachers' need for data to sustain and enhance their sense of personal teaching efficacy. Through the CAP process, conversations over multiple and varied data sources between a beginning teacher and his or her CAP consultant (i.e., extent and nature of student participation, results of teacher-developed tests, analysis of the match between lesson plans and courses of study) affected the novice teacher's sense of personal teaching efficacy.

(2) The CAP process recognizes the varying levels of professional development of "beginning" teachers. Evidence existed to support the proposition that CAP consultants attempted to be responsive to the differing needs of beginning teachers. The structure of the CAP process encouraged consultants to be responsive to the unfinished business of teacher

development in the Jones City Schools. This practice agrees with a number of researchers (Berliner, 1986; Fuller & Bown, 1975; Glickman, 1990; Huling-Auston, 1987; Johnston & Ryan, 1983; Sclan, 1993; Veenman, 1984) who believe that teachers experience different stages in their professional growth and those stages need to be considered when planning professional development activities.

(3)Teachers with a low sense of teaching efficacy fall into patterns of conformity and survival teaching. One informant doubted that he affected students' lives. This exceptional case agreed with Ashton and Webb's (1986) proposition that teachers with a low sense of either teaching or personal efficacy fall into patterns of conformity and survivalist teaching. Ashton and Webb discussed the ramifications of teachers feeling a low sense of teaching efficacy as being evidenced in a sense of powerlessness to affect students' lives. When faced with students who are not achieving, teachers with a low sense of teaching efficacy are unlikely to explore alternatives to their existing repertoire of instructional skills. These teachers define other causes for the students' difficulties; they tend to blame poor student achievement on the students themselves, their parents, or the cultural environment.

(4) Teachers' sense of personal teaching efficacy is situation-specific. Significant to this discussion is the concept of "situation-specific efficacy." Ashton and Webb (1986) tested Bandura's belief that teaching efficacy fluctuates depending on several variables such as teachers' perceived isolation, uncertainty about their effectiveness, lack of support and reward, and sense of powerlessness. The data revealed examples to support the situation-specific descriptor of personal teaching efficacy. For example, some informants spoke of a high sense of personal teaching efficacy in one school or grade level, but not in another. At times, informants even predicted their personal teaching efficacy--or lack of--in other settings. In

situations where teachers doubted their competence, discussions of almost passive compliance with their consultant's suggestions ensued. Survivalist teaching strategies replaced more creative, divergent ones.

(5) The construct of teachers' sense of efficacy remains difficult to assess. Further effort to refine measures of teachers' sense of efficacy will allow more defined methods to develop scales of high to low efficacy relative to these variables. Efficacy remains a difficult concept to measure because of its constant mediating effect on behavior, which in turn alters the sense of efficacy.

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